

Yamabushi in a Persimmon Tree

A trainee monk of Haguro-mountain in Dewa Province (in present-day Yamagata Prefecture), was on his way home after a period of hard training at Kazuraki-mountains. As he becomes very hungry on the way, he looks about for a farmer's house where he might ask for something to eat. He finds none but, instead, comes upon a persimmon tree by the wayside with a lot of ripe fruit. He tries every means to reach the fruit in vain. Finally he discovers that by climbing up the tree he can enjoy the delicious fruit.

While he was gorging himself on the fruit, the owner of the tree comes out on the daily watch. He finds a lot of seeds falling from above, and looking up sees a yamabushi in the tree. Pretending not noticing him, he says: "Oh, that's not a human being, but a crow; and a crow may caw. If it doesn't, I shall shoot an arrow at it." Hearing it caw, he remarks: "Wait a minute. Now I have a good look at it, I can see it is not a crow but a monkey." Without bestowing a look at the bewildered yamabushi, he goes on: "No, wait for a moment; it must be a kite. A kite will call and fly in the air." So saying he begins to chant, keeping time with his fan. Captivated by its rhythmical beat, the yamabushi innocently steps forward and falls immediately onto the ground, to his greatest pain and chagrin, and to the greatest merriment of the other.

Miidera

Distraught with grief because her son has been kidnapped by a slave-dealer, a mother who lives at Kiyomigaseki in Suruga Province (in present-day Shizuoka Prefecture) has become deranged. She makes a long pilgrimage to Kyoto in order to pray to the Kannon Bodhisatva at the Kiyomizu temple for divine help in finding her lost son. While she is praying days and nights the Kannon gives her an answer one evening through the means of a dream, telling her that she should speed to the Miidera temple.

The mother at once makes for the Miidera temple that stands by the Lake Biwa, or the Lake of Grebes as has been called from of old. It happens to be the evening of the harvest moon, and a large party of priests and disciples can be seen outside the temple yard in front of the main lecture hall for moon-viewing. Charmed by peals of the bell in such a beautiful setting, the mother wishes to toll it herself, but is prevented by the monk in charge of the belfry. So she recounts a number of famous stories and poems regarding the ringing of the bell, and, overwhelmed by the ecstasy of the moment, begging to be excused because of her insanity, she climbs up the tall bell tower and starts ringing the bell. While she is thus absorbed admiring the moon and ringing the bell, one of the attending disciples asks where the deranged woman comes from. When the name of Kiyomigaseki is mentioned, she recognizes in the questioner her missing son, to the utter consternation of all present. Overwhelmed with joy, the mother and her son travel homeward hand in hand, and live happily together for many years. Their home is said to have grown into one noted for its great felicity and prosperity.

(Takao Saijo)